

# INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES & MILITARY TURNOVER

Presented at NATO Technical Course HFM 180 – Strategies  
to Address Recruiting Retention Issues of the Military

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Based on "*Individual Differences and Later Turnover*" (Sumer, 2007)

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# Background

- Turnover “as an individual motivated choice behavior” (Campion, 1991, p. 199) is an important outcome variable for the military
- Not all types of voluntary turnover are “bad ” for the organization. Turnover can be quite functional if, for example, the individual leaving the organization is a poor performer.
- What is critical is **dysfunctional turnover**.
- Identifying organizational, job- and individual-related factors contributing to voluntary, dysfunctional turnover is imperative in order to take appropriate actions.

# Purpose

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- The purpose of this presentation is to review individual differences factors that are likely to play a role in the process of dysfunctional withdrawal from the military.

# Individual Differences Factors Relevant in Military Turnover:

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- Unmet expectations
- Work-family concerns
- Job related attitudes
- Person-environment fit

# 1. Unmet Expectations

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- Initial expectations not fulfilled at work - Critical especially in early attrition in the military (e.g., Griffeth & Hom, 2001).
- Met expectations modestly predict (corrected validity coefficient =  $-.15$ ) actual turnover behavior (Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000).
- Unmet expectations about job characteristics seem to determine the satisfaction level and the following drop out rate from initial training programs (van de Ven, 2003).



## Unmet Expectations

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- Young people employed on fixed-term contracts are likely to have a relatively instrumental attitude toward the military work.

## Unmet Expectations

- Unmet expectations and disappointments concerning readily observable aspects of work/job have a great deal of influence in the decision to drop out
  - salary
  - atmosphere in the workplace,
  - content of the job,
  - work relationships (van de Ven, 2003, the Royal Netherlands Army), &
  - lack of opportunities for sport, adventure, and an active life (Richardson 2003, the British Army)



## How Do Unmet Expectations Operate?

- Unmet expectations are believed to be a relatively distal group of variables affecting military turnover.
- Their effects on turnover are likely to be mediated by overall job satisfaction, and perhaps continuance commitment (CC), but not affective commitment (AC) (AC refers to an individual's emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the employing organization, whereas CC refers to perceptions of the costs associated with leaving the organization, Meyer & Allen, 1991, 1997).
- Since affective commitment is expected to be relatively resistant to direct influences of physical aspects of the job, it seems reasonable to expect that unmet expectation are likely to affect (i.e., decrease) continuance commitment rather than affective commitment.

# Unmet Expectations

## Realistic Job Previews As a Way to Deal With the Problem:

- Realistic job previews contribute significantly to the development of initial expectations concerning job and conditions of employment (Hom, Griffeth, Palich, & Bracker, 1999)

**RJP→Initial Expect.→Perceptions of Post-Entry Exper.→Job Sat.**

## 2. Work-Family Concerns/Balance

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- Work-family conflict - One of the critical determinants of turnover.
- Interrole conflict influences turnover through the mediated effects of job satisfaction and withdrawal cognitions (Hom & Kinicki, 2001).

## Work-Family Concerns/Balance

- Family considerations - Under researched in the prediction of retention/reenlistment decisions in the military (Kelley, Hock, Bonney, Jarvis, Smith, & Gaffney, 2001).
- Work-family concerns are closely interrelated with factors like work overload, perstempo, and deployments.
- Most military jobs make work-family balance quite challenging:
  - frequent and long deployments,
  - overnight duty,
  - long work hours,
  - high tempo,
  - work overload (Dunn & Morrow, 2002).



## Work-Family Concerns/Balance

- Navy fathers and mothers anticipating deployment report substantial levels of separation anxiety characterized by guilt, shame, and concerns about the interruption of family relationships (see Kelley et al., 2001).
- Deployed fathers report disrupted communication patterns, feelings of out of synchrony with the family and problems in establishing and maintaining strong parent-child attachment (see Kelley et al., 2001).
- Enlisted men and their spouses report incompatibility of child rearing with the army life (Price & Kim, 1993).

## Work-Family Concerns/Balance

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### Other findings:

- Active duty air-force women who gave birth were twice as likely to leave the military compared to women who did not give birth during the same time period (Price, 1998).
- The majority of the respondents (81.6%), who applied for premature voluntary release in the British Army, reported that their decision was related very much to the impact of the Army on personal and/or domestic life (Richardson, 2003).



## Work-Family Concerns/Balance

- 14% of both active-duty and reserve members, (20% for Army members) report that their desire to stay decreased as a result of tempo, or being away more than expected (U.S. Department of Defense, 2005).
- The British Airmen and Non-Commissioned Aircrew Leaver's survey results indicated that "family stability" was the factor with the highest importance rating in the decision to leave especially for personnel with more than six years of tenure.
- Furthermore, high workload, lack of notice for postings, and frequency of detachments were among factors with relatively high importance ratings (Brackley, 2003).

# Work-Family Concerns/Balance

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- Perstempo factors (e.g., frequent and long pre-deployment trainings and deployments themselves), QoL concerns, and work overload were among the reported reasons (or potential reasons) for leaving the CF (Dunn & Morrow, 2002).
- Participants in this study indicated family concerns as being one of the most critical factors in the decision to leave or stay in the military. Critical issues under this general theme:
  - inability to balance work and family life,
  - problems associated with being absent from home during postings,
  - lack of support services when members were away from home or were deployed,
  - lack of provisions for single parent families, &
  - spouses'/partners' careers being negatively affected by postings

# Work-Family Concerns/Balance

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The effects of frequency of deployment on the decision to stay:

- The relationship between deployment frequency and withdrawal intentions is not necessarily linear.
- Castro and Adler's (1999) model predicts that moderate levels of deployments, garrison duties, and training activities are likely to facilitate soldier and unit readiness and that retention tends to decline only when opstempo levels are either very high or very low.

# Work-Family Concerns/Balance

## The effects of frequency of deployment on the decision to stay:

- Supporting this model, Huffman et al. (2000) found that officers with at least one deployment (but not two or three deployments) were more likely to report that they were staying in the military than those with no previous deployment experience.
- Furthermore, although junior officers with at least one deployment experience were more likely to stay in, those expecting to deploy a lot in the future were more inclined to leave the military.
- Similarly, Sticha et al. (cited in Huffman, Adler, Castro, & Dolan, 2000) reported that moderate levels of personnel tempo had a positive impact on retention.



# How Do Work-Family Concerns Operate?

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Dowden's (2000) conceptual model of QoL in the Canadian Forces makes the following assumptions:

- 1) QoL domains such as income, job characteristics, family domain, and friends and friendship, are significant contributors of global QoL;
- 2) Enhancing the global QoL has an impact on subjective variables like satisfaction, commitment, and motivation;
- 3) The global QoL perceptions influence important organizational outcomes, mainly retention, absenteeism, and performance through the mediating effects of subjective organizational variables.

## How Do Work-Family Concerns Operate?

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- Work-family concerns, as part of broader QoL factors, seem to contribute to the development of turnover intentions through their influence on overall job satisfaction and continuance commitment.



### 3. Job-Related Attitudes

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#### Job Satisfaction:

- Defined as an affective response to specific facets of job (e.g., pay and benefits, physical conditions, and leadership).
- Treated as a major variable in the decision making process concerning whether or not to leave the organization.
- Shown to influence turnover not directly but through turnover thoughts and intentions (e.g., Dallessio, Silverman, & Schuck, 1986; Hom, Griffeth, & Sellarro, 1984; Mobley, 1977).
- Personal and work characteristics are assumed to influence turnover intentions (and hence turnover) through their effects on job satisfaction (e.g., Griffeth & Hom, 2001).

# Job-Related Attitudes

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## Job Satisfaction:

- Most turnover models have been developed for and are more applicable to civilian situations.
- Some of the meta-analytic reviews of turnover include organizational type (military vs. non-military) among the potential moderators within turnover models.
- These studies suggest that the relationship between job satisfaction turnover is likely to be somewhat different for military samples than for civilian samples (e.g., Carsten & Spector, 1987).

## Job-Related Attitudes

### Job Satisfaction:

- Because of contractual obligations, satisfaction is likely to have a weaker influence on withdrawal cognitions and actual turnover for military samples than for civilian samples (e.g., Carsten et al., 1992).
- The decision making process in military seems more planned and programmed; individuals are expected to choose between reenlistment and separation much before the end of their current tour of duty.
- Dissatisfaction was less related with thoughts of quitting in the military samples ( $-.57$  vs.  $-.65$ ), and there was a closer agreement between quit intentions and withdrawal behavior for the military samples ( $.40$ ) than for the civilian ( $.34$ ) samples (Hom et al., 1992).

# Job-Related Attitudes

## Organizational Commitment:

- Refers to a person's belief in and acceptance of the organizations values and goals, willingness to exert effort for the benefit of the organization, and desire to maintain membership in that organization .
- Is a relatively stable and more global attitude toward the employing organization.
- Has been consistently shown to be related to variables associated with employee withdrawal.
- Predicts turnover (average corrected correlation coefficient =  $-.23$ ) better than does overall satisfaction ( $-.19$ ). The predictive power of commitment is even larger for military samples ( $-.28$ ) (Griffeth et al., 2000).



# Job-Related Attitudes

## Organizational Commitment:

- Meyer and Allen's (1997) conceptualization of commitment as a three-component structure:
  - Affective Commitment (AC) - "Want to"
  - Continuance Commitment (CC) - "Need to"
  - Normative Commitment (NC) - "Ought to"

# Job-Related Attitudes

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## Organizational Commitment:

- All three commitment dimensions are correlated negatively with turnover intentions (e.g., Meyer, et al., 2002).
- AC is a better predictor of variables associated with military withdrawal than the other two dimensions (Tremble et al., 2003).



# Job-Related Attitudes

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## Organizational Identification (OID):

- Defined as a form of social identification in which people define themselves by their membership in an organization (Mael & Ashforth, 1995).
- In the process of identification with the organization, people internalize the attributes and values associated with the organization as their own.
- While OID is necessarily organization specific, commitment may not be. In fact, OID is expected to be high for at least some people prior to their actual working in the organization.

# Job-Related Attitudes

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## Organizational Identification (OID):

- At the conceptual level OID seems to be akin to AC as defined by Meyer and Allen (1991).
- OID has been found to be a significant predictor of military attrition especially during the first six months of the enlistment (Mael & Ashforth, 1995).

# How do Work Attitudes Fit in the Military Turnover Process:

## The Interplay between Satisfaction and Commitment:

1. Both AC and CC (AC to a greater extent than CC) and job satisfaction contribute to turnover intentions.
2. The nature of the relationship between AC and satisfaction is likely to be cyclical in nature. That is, satisfaction is expected to play a role in the development of AC, but once established, AC can be expected to have an influence on satisfaction.
3. CC is expected to be influenced by satisfaction or dissatisfaction with specific, especially, extrinsic aspects of job, such as pay and benefits (see Allen, 2003).

## 4. Person-Environment Fit

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- Personality
- Psychological Well-Being
- Person-Organization Fit

## Person-Environment Fit

- Some argue that reenlistment decisions may have less to do with attitudes concerning specific job duties and, perhaps, more to do with personal characteristics/inclinations, and especially with values.
- Fit between the person (as represented by the personality attributes, interests, skills, abilities, and values) and the environment (as represented by the job or occupation, or the organization) plays a critical role in a number of valued organizational outcomes, including
  - job satisfaction,
  - organizational commitment,
  - career involvement, &
  - career success.



# Person-Environment Fit

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## Fit in Terms of Personality Attributes:

- Schneider's (1987' 1995) Attraction-Selection-Attrition (ASA) Model states that individuals are attracted to, selected by, and stay with organizations that suit their personality characteristics.



# Person-Environment Fit

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## Fit in Terms of Personality Attributes: How to Measure it?

- Predictive/regression approach
  - involves examining the effects of single personality characteristic on the outcome variables, such as satisfaction, turnover intentions, and actual turnover.
- Commensurate measurement approach
  - requires measuring the congruence between the person's personality and the organization's ideal personality type using the same content domain.

# Person-Environment Fit

## Effects of Specific Personality Attributes:

- Agreeableness and neuroticism (Boudreau, Boswell, Judge, & Bretz, 2001)
- Negative affectivity (Griffeth & Hom, 2001)
- Proactive personality (McIntyre et al., 2002)

# Person-Environment Fit

## Effects of Specific Personality Attributes:

- Specific personality traits have relatively weak direct effects on withdrawal process.
- They are generally assumed to have indirect effects on turnover, through their effects on job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Westerman & Cyr, 2004).

# Person-Environment Fit

## Congruence of Individual's Personality with Environmental Type:

- Commensurate measurement approach may be an alternative.
- In this approach personality congruence is measured by correlating the personality profile of the prototypical successful personnel (by aggregating the "ideal personality" ratings given by participants from a given organization) to each individual's own personality profile.
- When measured this way, personality congruence contributes directly to intention to remain with the organization (Westerman & Cyr, 2004).

# Person-Environment Fit

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## Fit in Terms of Psychological Well-Being:

- Mental-health-related problems play a critical role in a significant portion of the turnover/discharge within the first six months of enlistment in the U.S. Armed Forces (Cigrang et al., 2000).
- Mental-health-related factors are one of the common predictors of discharge in United States Air Force basic military training (Lando & Fiedler, 1999).
- Depression scores predict attrition from the military training for both male and female trainees (Holden & Scholtz, 2002).



# Person-Environment Fit

## Person-Organization (P-O) Fit: Values Congruence

- P-O fit refers to the extent to which an employee's personal values and the employing organization's values/culture are congruent or compatible.
- It is the similarity between deeply seated individual and organizational characteristics.
- P-O fit is predictive of important organizational outcomes, such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intentions (e.g., Cable & Judge, 1996; Lauver & Kristof-Brown, 2001; O'Reilly, Chatman, & Caldwell, 1991).

# Person-Environment Fit

## Person-Organization (P-O) Fit: Values Congruence

- Westerman and Cyr (2004) found that:
  - Values congruence predicted both job satisfaction and organizational commitment.
  - Job satisfaction and commitment mediated the relationship between values congruence and turnover intentions.
  - In addition to its indirect influences through satisfaction and commitment, values congruence had a direct effect on turnover intentions.

# The Role of Person-Environment Fit

- Based on the reviewed evidence, personality, psychological well being, and values are all expected to play a role in the process of military turnover.
- There seems to be stronger evidence for the inclusion of values congruence as an important component in the military turnover process (e.g., Cable & Judge, 1996, Lauver & Kristof-Brown, 2001; O'Reilly, Chatman, & Caldwell, 1991; Westreman & Cyr, 2004).
- As stated by Puente (2007), values are especially crucial in the military context, in both recruitment and retention processes.
- Values congruence or P-O fit can be hypothesized to influence military turnover especially through its influence over work attitudes, mainly job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

# Individual Differences Factors in the Employee Withdrawal Process and Some Practical Implications

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## Concerning Unmet Expectations:

- More realistic (!) "realistic job previews - RJP" can be used to create accurate expectations concerning military life awaiting the candidates.
- More realistic job previews may involve extended visits to military bases and/or extended probationary/try-out periods.
- Also, policies aiming to improve the QoL of military personnel and their dependents are important ways to reduce disappointments concerning the military life.



# Individual Differences Factors in the Employee Withdrawal Process and Some Practical Implications

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## Concerning Work-Family Concerns:

- Improving the QoL life is also expected to provide a base for a more balanced work-family life.
- As suggested by Marrow (2004), managing deployment time seems to be a critical factor in ensuring quality of life, hence positive job attitudes, for military personnel.
- Optimum number, frequency, and length of deployments for different groups of military personnel need to be identified to maximize the outcomes for both the members and the organization.



# Individual Differences Factors in the Employee Withdrawal Process and Some Practical Implications

## Concerning Job-Related Attitudes:

- Military organizations have long been aware of the role of job attitudes, especially job satisfaction and commitment, in the member withdrawal process.
- In the proposed military turnover model (see Sumer & van de Ven, 2007), job satisfaction and both types of organizational commitment are expected to be among the critical mediators in military turnover.
- That is, the effects of person-environment fit and work-nonwork concerns on military turnover are expected to take place through their effects on these critical work-related attitudes.

# Individual Differences Factors in the Employee Withdrawal Process and Some Practical Implications

## Concerning Job-Related Attitudes:

- Factors immediately influencing job satisfaction and commitment in the military withdrawal process are well-documented (e.g., QoL perceptions & P-O fit).
- Person-organization fit, especially in the form of values congruence, can best be dealt within the processes of recruitment and selection. In addition to aiming to find the best fitting personnel in terms of skills and abilities, **military recruitment and selection efforts can be geared toward finding the best fitting members in terms of the honored values.**
- Policies and strategies aiming to maximize the quality of both work and non-work life of the military members are expected to facilitate the development of positive job attitudes, mainly satisfaction.

# Individual Differences Factors in the Employee Withdrawal Process and Some Practical Implications

## Concerning Job-Related Attitudes:

- Leader-member relations are critical in assuring positive work attitudes yet they are perhaps the most difficult ones to be influenced by short-term organizational interventions. A system-wide change or a cultural change may be required to create an environment nourishing positive work-related attitudes.

# Individual Differences Factors in the Employee Withdrawal Process and Some Practical Implications

## Concerning Person-Environment Fit:

- Values congruence, or P-O fit, had stronger relationships with both intermediate and ultimate outcomes in the turnover process than any other index of person-environment fit.
- Although there are post-hire means to increase the fit of the members in terms of values, such as training programs or the job experience itself, recruitment and selection activities allow for the use of more direct means to assure values congruence between the members and the organization.
- Although they have relatively less strong relationships with the critical variables in the turnover process, both psychological well-being and personality assessment should be part of the military selection process.





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# Questions & Comments